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ABSTRACT

The transition from the structure of prison life to the freedom of the community is considered an uncertain, confusing, and stressful period which often results in renewed criminal behavior. To explore the experiences and needs of juvenile offenders, 27 youths recently released from secure detention to the community completed the Needs Evaluation Survey (NES) and provided background information, e.g., age, sex, length of stay, prior charges. The NES is a semi-structured interview with scaled items and open-ended questions designed to assess reintegration problems in the areas of school, social, and home life, legal involvement, and the transitional experience, and to explore subjects' interest in reintegration programming. The results indicated that the youths reported skipping school less often than before detainment, having a positive relationship with their caseworkers, having a positive home environment with no change in punishments or restrictions, and a positive relationship with their parents. However, all youths who were placed with a nonparent reported a rough transition to the community. Participants reported experiencing difficulty in dealing with people since their detention, but feeling prepared for the transition to the community, although they had little release preparation. They expressed strong interest in prelease, postrelease, and home visit program planning, with youths placed with a nonparent expressing the most need. No relationship was found between amount of time in detention, or the seriousness of offense, and the reentry experience. (LLL)

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Reintegration of Juvenile Offenders:

A Needs Assessment

(Final Report)

by

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This paper was presented at the annual convention of the American Society of Criminology, Denver, Colorado, 1983.

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ABSTRACT

This study explored the experiences and needs of juvenile offenders released from secure detention to the community. Twenty-seven youths detained for longer than eight days were interviewed within two weeks after release. The Needs Evaluation Survey (NES) interveiw consisted of one hundred thirty semi-structured, open-ended questions assessing reintegration problems in the areas of school, social, and home life; legal involvement; the transitional experience; as well as exploring the youths' interest in reintegration programming. Cross-tabulations and T-tests were performed on the items and scales developed from the interview. The results indicated that supportive relationships and ongoing treatment are related to successful reentry. They further demonstrated the importance of the family in reintegration. However, no relationship was found between the amount of time in detention and the reentry experience. Despite relatively positive reentry experiences, the youths expressed strong interest in prerelease, postrelease, and home visit programming.

It has been suggested that over 95% of the individuals who are incarcerated will be released and will return to the community (Glaser, 1964; Michigan Prison Overcrowding Project, 1983). The transition from the structure of the institution to the freedom of the community is considered an uncertain, confusing, and stressful period (Eskridge, Seiter, & Carlson, 1981) which often results in renewed criminal behavior (Wittenberg & LeClair, 1979).

Erickson, Crow, Zurcher, and Connett (1973) argue that one of the most recent important developments in corrections is the reintegration of the offender from confinement to the community. The reintegrative model acknowledges the consequences of community isolation (Eskridge et al., 1981), and has as its goals neutralizing the effects of incarceration and fostering outside community ties (LeClair, 1979). The goal is not to "correct", "cure", or "treat" (LeClair, 1979), but instead stresses community systems such as family, peer groups, and the larger society (Culbertson, 1981). This model considers it "unrealistic to expect an offender to return to the community after a period of incarceration and handle the problems of day-to-day living" (Eskridge et al., 1981, p. 181). Reintegration efforts should encourage effective social links between the offender and the community (McArthur, 1974).

Issues that have often been linked to reintegration include the length of institutionalization (Goodstein, 1979), the individual's stake in the community (Miller, 1970), and the offender's social and cultural environment (Empey, 1967). The major factors associated

with postrelease success center around jobs, family, friends, and the community (Briggs, 1978; Culbertson, 1981; Erickson et al., 1973; McArthur, 1974; Renzema, 1980; Waller, 1974).

A number of types of programs have emerged in attempts to ameliorate postrelease trauma and relieve problems associated with poor reentry. Such programs include prerelease programs (Baker, 1966; Catalino, 1967; Novotny & Enomoto, 1976), probation and parole (Lipton, Martinson, & Wilks, 1975; Martinson & Wilks, 1977; Miller & Montilla, 1977; Moseley, 1977), work release (Miller & Montilla, 1977), furloughs (Glaser, 1973; Miller, 1977; Miller & Montilla, 1977; Sullivan, Seigel & Clear, 1974); and halfway houses and other aftercare placements (Anthony, Buel, Sharratt, & Althoff, 1972; Couse, 1965; Ehrlich, 1980; Fixsen, Phillips, & Wolf, 1973; Phillips, Phillips, Fixsen, & Wolf, 1980; Richmond, 1971).

There are two major deficiencies in the current reintegration literature. First, the majority of the literature focuses on the adult offender. The application of literature and programs designed for adult offenders to juveniles is of dubious value. It is imperative that the needs of juvenile offenders, as a distinct and novel population, be assessed.

The second deficiency is in the lack of studies that examine reintegration as experienced by the offender. The need to focus on inmates' needs has been acknowledged for over 100 years (Briggs, 1978). Recent studies of prerelease have supported the need to involve offenders in reintegration program development (McCarthy & McCarthy, 1983), but the issue remains neglected.

The present study was designed to assess and evaluate the needs and problems of juvenile detainees who were released to the local community. This was done through a qualitative interview developed specifically for this needs evaluation.

METHOD

Subjects

The participants were 27 youths who had been detained for a minimum of eight days and were released to the community (i.e., a relative, foster home, or group home). The detention facility contains 17 beds and serves a county of over 270,000 people. The disciplinary and reward system that operates is based on a typical level system where the youths earn extra priviledges and responsibilities as they demonstrate appropriate behavior.

Measures

Interview. The Needs Evaluation Survey (NES) is a semi-structured open-ended qualitative interview which consists of 104 scaled items and 26 open-ended items. Items were designed to investigate issues hypothesized to be related to reentry. These issues addressed school, court, social, familial, and transitional concerns.

Archival data. The archival data collection form was designed to extract background information such as age, sex, race, charges, length of stay, prior record, prior community placements, and current community placements.

Procedure

Subject referral. Youths were introduced to the project six to eight days after intake. The procedure was explained by the interviewers so as to orient the youths. Daily rosters were accessed to obtain the names of youths (and their caseworkers) who were released after eight days. Caseworkers were contacted to obtain the phone numbers and addresses of those who had been placed in the community. A letter explaining the research was then sent to the parent or guardian and an interview was arranged with the youth.

Interview training. Five undergraduates served as interviewers. The research procedure was discussed, as were issues of confidentiality and interviewing techniques, including the asking of open-ended questions and the avoidance of double-barrelled questions. Items and response categories were discussed to ensure a complete and consensual agreement. After conducting mock interviews, the interviewers participated in a number of coding sessions, and finally conducted a pilot interview.

Interviewing and coding procedures. The interviewing process was again explained to the youth at the time of the interview. Verbal assent was obtained prior to the interview which lasted approximately 45 minutes and was audio recorded. Interviewers coded the tapes of the individuals they interviewed and observers coded the tapes of the interviews they observed. Observers were present for approximately 25% of the interviews. Interrater reliability was computed as "percent agreement" for three separate sections of the interview: all scaled items, only the independent items, and the open-ended

items. When considering total percent agreement, the sections averaged 73%, 80%, and 82% respectively. When considering off-by-one response percent agreement, there was an average of 87% agreement for all scaled items and 91% for the independent items. Similar procedures were undertaken for the archival data, which resulted in a mean of 98% agreement.

Scale Development

Items with high endorsement frequencies, little variance, or large numbers of missing data were eliminated from scale development. The remaining items were grouped rationally and assessed for their internal consistency and discriminant validity. The resulting nine scales were: changes in school, concern about school problems, meetings with caseworker, rules of probation, comfort with others, change with friends, environment of home, and preparation for release. The coefficient Alpha's ranged from .46 to .88 and the scale intercorrelations ranged from .00 to .86.

RESULTS

Sample Characteristics

The average participant was white, male, in the mid-teens, and had been previously detained. He was on probation and performed academically at a level below that for which he was enrolled.

School

There was a general improvement in the school behavior and attitude. The youths expressed some concern about school problems and reported skipping school less than before they were detained.

Court

The youths reported a positive relationship with their caseworkers, and satisfaction with the logistics of their casework meetings. They reported relative satisfaction with the rules of probation.

Older youths reported spending more time in release preparation with their caseworkers than did younger kids. Girls reported longer casework meetings than did boys. Whites spent more than one day in release preparation, while non-whites spent less than one day.

Those who were previously detained felt more prepared for release by their caseworkers. Youths who were detained longer reported longer casework meetings than did those detained less time. Longer casework meetings were also associated with greater transitional smoothness (see Table 1).

Social

Youths reported some difficulty in dealing with other people since detention. They reported no drug problems, and they also reported seeing their friends less than they did before detention.

Family

Youths reported a positive home environment with no change in the extent to which they were punished or to which restrictions were placed on them. They also reported an improved relationship with their parents.

Transitional

Youths reported little involvement in release preparation, but most felt well prepared, nevertheless. Over half of the youths

reported a smooth transition. However, all youths who placed with a nonparent reported a rough transition to the community (see Table 2).

Program Desires

The youths reported an interest in prerelease, postrelease, and home visit program planning (see Table 3). Girls wanted a prerelease program more than boys (see Table 4A). Those placed with a nonparent were more interested in postrelease (see Table 5A) and home visit programs (see Table 6) than were those placed with a parent. Youths who had a positive relationship with their caseworker reported greater interest in prerelease (see Table 4B) and postrelease programming (see Table 5C) than those with a negative relationship. Those who felt well prepared for release reported interest in postrelease programs nevertheless (see Table 5B).

DISCUSSION

Overall, results from the Needs Evaluation Survey scales indicate positive reentry experiences. This was not always the case, however, as reflected by their discomfort with others in discussing detention, less frequent encounters with their friends, and little involvement in their release preparation.

No relationship was found between the amount of time in detention or the seriousness of offense, and the reentry experience. Supportive relationships and ongoing treatment was related to positive reintegration. Dentention also served to strengthen family ties and

weaken friendship ties. The family played a significant role in the transitional experience of these youths.

The youths were strongly supportive of prerelease, postrelease, and home-visit programming. Perhaps the most striking finding of this research was the relationship between community placement and reentry programming. Youths who were not placed with a parent felt emphatic about the need for adequate home visit and postrelease programming. These youths were being placed in an unfamiliar location and a home visit would have allowed them an opportunity to gradually adjust to this new environment. Their strong interest in postrelease programming indicated adjustment problems unique to youths placed with a nonparent. These findings were consistent with the negative transitional experiences of these youths.

It is essential that any youth who participates in a reentry program be allowed frequent opportunities to provide feedback about that program. In this way, programs can be specifically tailored to individual youths. A set of programs can be developed which allow specific details to vary according to the individual needs and desires of each participant.

Table 1

Crosstabulations, Chi Squares, and Phi Coefficients/Cramer's Vs of Court Items

1A. Time Caseworker Spent Preparing Youth for Release (#86)[a]

		Less than one day	More than one day
Age	13-15	9 (41%)	2 (9%)
	16-17	3 (14%)	8 (36%)

Corrected[b] $\chi^2 = 4.58$
Degree of Freedom = 1
$p < .05$
Phi = .55

[a]Item Number from Needs Evaluation Survey
[b]Corrected with Yate's Correction

1B. Length of Caseworker Meetings (#31)

		Less than 15 minutes	15-29 minutes	30-44 minutes	45-59 minutes	More than 60 minutes
Sex	Male	4 (15%)	8 (30%)	3 (11%)	0	5 (19%)
	Female	0	1 (4%)	0	3 (11%)	3 (11%)

Raw $\chi^2 = 12.61$
Degrees of Freedom = 4
$p < .01$
Cramer's V = .68

1C. Time Caseworker Spent Preparing Youth for Release (#86)

		Less than one day	More than one day
Race	nonwhite	7 (32%)	1 (5%)
	white	5 (23%)	9 (41%)

Corrected $\chi^2 = 3.62$ Raw $\chi^2 = 5.51$
Degree of Freedom = 1
$p < .10$ $p < .05$
Phi = .50

Table I (cont'd)

1D. Extent to Which Caseworker Prepared Youth for Release (#87)

Youth Previously Detained		Not at All	Very Little	A Little	Somewhat	A Great Deal
	No	3 (13%)	3 (13%)	0	0	0
	Yes	5 (21%)	0	3 (13%)	7 (29%)	3 (13%)

Raw $\chi^2 = 14.00$
Degrees of Freedom = 4
$p < .01$
Cramer's V = .76

1E. Length of Caseworker Meetings (#31)

Days in Detention	Less than 29 minutes	More than 30 minutes
10-22	10 (37%)	4 (15%)
23-54	3 (11%)	10 (37%)

Corrected $\chi^2 = 4.52$
Degree of Freedom = 1
$p < .05$
Phi = .48

1F. Transition Smoothness (#83)

Length of Caseworker Meetings (#81)	Very Little 1-3	Somewhat 4 &5
Less than 15 minutes	0	4 (15%)
15-29 minutes	6 (22%)	3 (11%)
30-44 minutes	0	3 (11%)
45-59 minutes	3 (11%)	0
60 minutes or more	2 (7%)	6 (22%)

Raw $\chi^2 = 12.50$
Degrees of Freedom = 4
$p < .01$
Cramer's V = .68

Table 2

Crosstabluation, Chi Square, and Phi Coefficient of Home Life Item

		Extent to Which Transition was Smooth (#83)	
		Very Little 1 & 2	Somewhat 3-5
Placement (#65)	Parent	7 (26%)	16 (59%)
	Nonparent	4 (15%)	0

Corrected $\chi^2 = 4.25$
Degree of Freedom = 1
$p < .05$
Phi = .50

Table 3

Frequencies on Reintegration Program Items

	Response Values				
	1	2	3	4	5
Extent to which youth supports a PRERELEASE program (#97)[a]	5 (18.5%)	2 (7.4%)	1 (3.7%)	16 (59.3%)	3 (11.1%)
Extent to which youth supports a POSTRELEASE program (#98)	7 (26.9%)	1 (7.7%)	6 (23.1%)	8 (30.8%)	4 (15.4%)
Extent to which youth thinks a home visit should be required (#104)	7 (26.9%)	2 (7.7%)	1 (3.8%)	8 (30.8%)	8 (30.8%)

[a]Item Number on Needs Evaluation Survey

Table 4

T-Tests of Prerelease Program Items

4A. Sex

	Girls (N=7)	Boys (N=20)
Extent to which youth supports a prerelease program (#97)	4.14	3.1

$T^a = 2.95$
Degrees of Freedom = 24.21
$p < .01$

[a]T computed on separate variance estimates

4B. Extent to Which Youth Supports a Prerelease Program (#97)

	Very Little (N=8) 1-3	A Great Deal (N=19) 4 & 5
Relationship with Caseworker (RWC)	2.70	3.46

$T^a = 2.81$
Degrees of Freedom = 24.82
$p < .01$

[a]T computed on separate variance estimates

Table 5

T-Tests of Postrelease Program Items

5A. Placement (#65)

	Parent (N=23)	NonParent (N=4)
Extent to which youth supports a postrelease program (#98)	2.65	4.50

$T^a = 2.41$
Degrees of Freedom = 25
$p < .054$

[a]T computed on pooled variance estimates

5B. Extent to Which Youth Supports a Postrelease Program (#98)

	Very Little (N=15) 1-3	A Great Deal (N=12) 4 & 5
Preparation for Release (PFR)	2.63	3.47

$T^a = 2.48$
Degrees of Freedom = 25
$p < .05$

[a]T computed on pooled variance estimates

5C. Extent to Which Youth Supports a Postrelease Program (#98)

	Very Little (N=15) 1-3	A Great Deal (N=12) 4 & 5
Relationship with Caseworker (RWC)	2.92	3.63

$T^a = 2.12$
Degrees of Freedom = 25
$p < .05$

[a]T computed on pooled variance estimates

Table 6

T-Tests of Home Visit Items

Placement (#65)

	Parent (N=23)	NonParent (N=4)
Extent to which youth thinks a home visit should be required (#104)	2.87	4.00

$T^a = 2.49$
Degrees of Freedom = 25
$p < .05$

[a] T computed on pooled variance estimates

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